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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

September 2009

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The September luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, September 17, 2009, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The program will be on the history and rededication of Tercentenary Park with special guests Erik Fleischer, Normandy Gack, and Nancy Bergere of the Bucks/Mont restoration group who have been instrumental in restoration of the park. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call by noon on Wednesday, September 16, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-five people, and to apprise Michelle of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$8.00.

ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

October is almost here, and it's time to finalize plans for the Hancock County Historical Society Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Saturday, October 31, 2009, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. We need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House.



The Pirate House stood at 649 North Beach Boulevard in Waveland, but was destroyed by Hurricane Camille on August 17, 1969.

Who Built the Pirate House of Waveland?

By
Russell Guerin

It all starts with a legend, one passed down orally in the traditions of Hancock County, but most clearly stated in the Works Progress Administration history project. It states that the "Pirate House" was "the plantation home of a famous pirate—or an associate of pirates—who gave signal aid to General Jackson during the War of 1812." The builder was suspected of being an "over-lord" of pirates that plied the Gulf waters in the early 1800's. He was said to have organized pirates, including the

brothers Lafitte, to defend New Orleans against the British, "whipping them into an army of loyal Americans."

A separate article by this writer has put forward the conclusion that the Pirate House was used for the purpose of smuggling slaves into Louisiana at a time when importation was banned under the provisions of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. (*The article is contained in the April 2005 issue of The Historian which may be found on our website.*)

The house is said to date back to circa 1804. Some people believe that it was owned by Jean Lafitte. We do know that Lafitte, or a man who spelled his name similarly, entered into five purchases in Hancock County, and in one, written in French, he was referred to as

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LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)

MISSION STATEMENT

"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

"Sieur" Lafitte, giving him an appellation of distinction as "Sir" or "Lord" while witnesses to the document were not so identified.

An argument against the Lafitte connection is that we know the real pirate was very busy in other places, such as Louisiana's Barataria and Texas' Galveston. His activities seem to have been broadly in the Caribbean, whereas there is little evidence of his pirating in Mississippi waters.

Lafitte will not be the main character of this investigation into who might have built, very early on, a magnificent house, a virtual palace, in what eventually became Waveland but at the time would have been a beachfront wilderness.

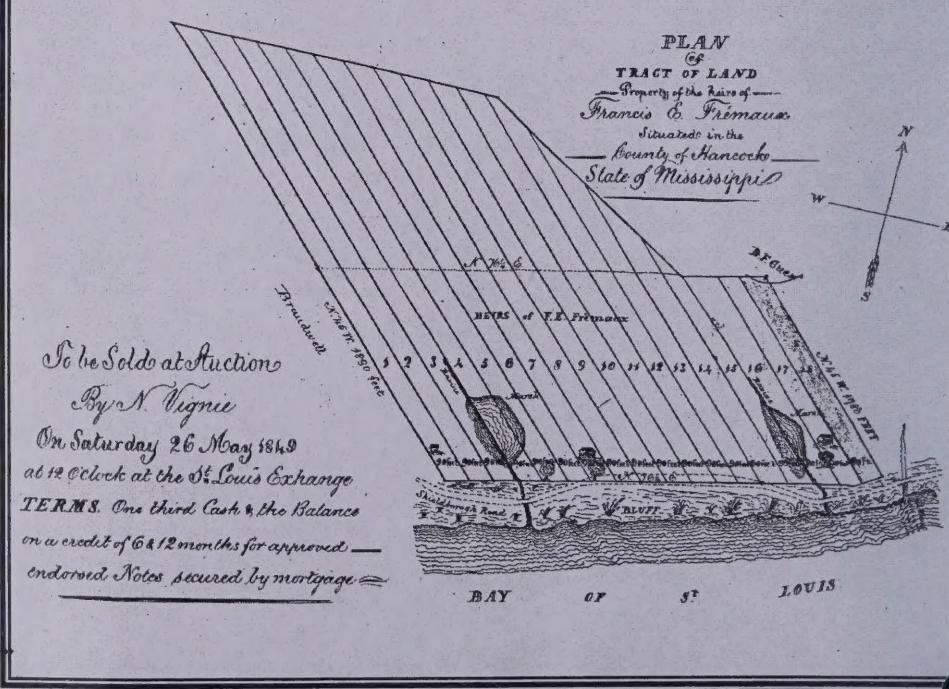
On balance, it must be assumed that man would have been someone else.

He must have been wealthy, a person of great influence, and to fit the WPA report, someone who can be shown in history to have had contact with pirates and to have helped General Jackson and New Orleans defeat the British.

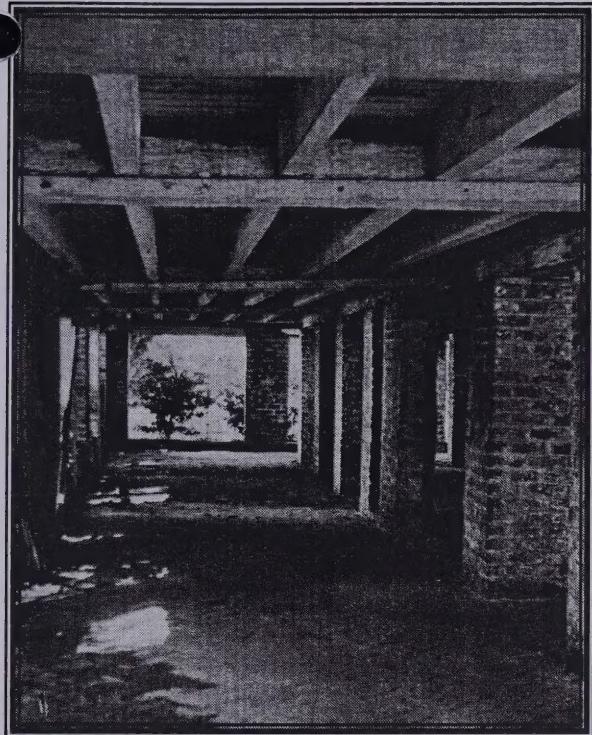
After much investigation, and assuming that there is any truth to the legend, that man can only have been one Jean Blanque.

Blanque is nothing less than an historical puzzle. Not a great deal is known of him. There has been found no biography, no memoir, no chapter in any book about this person, nothing really to elucidate his character. What we know of him are facts that in many ways are contradictory.

The earliest mention of Blanque has him arriving in Louisiana on the frigate *Surveillant*, the



Dated May 26, 1849, this is the earliest map the Historical Society has showing the location of the Pirate House. The house sits near the beach in lot 7 on the map. The two bodies of water, one on the left and the other on the right, are natural inlets and still exist today. The pond on the left is quite noticeable from the beach. The one on the right is just east of present day Aiken Road.



This picture shows the area beneath the Pirate House. Legend tells of an underground tunnel, and there are reports from longtime residents who say they have been in the tunnel. Reports also put forth that the tunnel ran to water. The author supposes that the tunnel was actually a dungeon.

same voyage that brought Pierre Clement Laussat, Napoleon's appointment to be prefect of the colony just before the 1803 transfer. There is no indication that Blanque had any official duties relative to Laussat. The latter did mention Blanque in his memoirs, but only to say that he was "my faithful friend" and to call him by a peculiar title, "commissioner of war." This seems to have referred to his duties in the French army before going to Louisiana.

Whatever Blanque's plans had been in coming to Louisiana, he wasted no time in getting deeply involved as a lawyer and legislator and as a successful banker, merchant, and businessman. There are numerous records of his holding sway over a group of government officials with mentions such as "those who always voted with Blanque."

He lived in one of the finest houses in the French Quarter of New Orleans and married into one of the leading old families. His wife was Delphine McCarty, who later became the infamous Madame

Lalaure, the mistress of the haunted house of Royal Street.

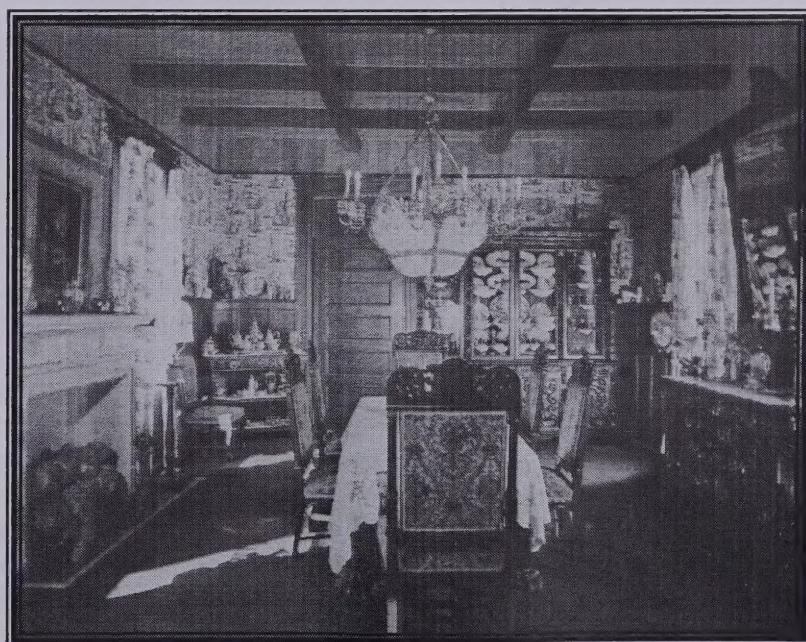
An anomaly, Blanque apparently led two lives. The public one is as described above, an upstanding pillar of his adopted community. The other, one that required less allegiance to that community, was in the words of histo-

rian, Clisby Arthur, "the man higher up in certain transitions relative to the importation of 'black ivory' and goods upon which custom duty was not collected."

As early as August 11, 1804, Blanque wrote a letter to the city of New Orleans protesting the seizure of his storehouse by the custom officers. Details are not known, but the letter remains in city archives.

Besides Arthur, other historians have taken a dim view of the dealings of Jean Blanque. Dr. Robert V. Remini, the biographer of Andrew Jackson, states that Blanque owned a number of ships used by pirates. William Davis, in his book *The Pirates Laffite*, asserts, "New Orleans merchants, such as Jean Blanque, engaged sailors who plied both sides of the law" and "was also an investor in more than one privateer, which likely led to an acquaintance with the Laffites."

Indeed, there are a couple of mentions of a small schooner used by the Lafitte band; its name was the *Blanque* and may have been the



This is the dining room of the Pirate House. Notice the beautiful wood ceiling, the magnificent chandelier, and rich furnishings in the house.

boat on which Pierre Lafitte suffered a mortal injury.

Davis tells in certain terms that Blanque was once prosecuted for involvement in a matter of twenty-seven thousand pounds of coffee pirated from an American ship. He also speculates on Blanque's having been the consignee of smuggled goods in an affair of "Captain Lafayette's prize British merchantman *Hector*, revealed later to be an imposter smuggling goods under forged ship's papers."

It may be difficult to reconcile how respected, financially successful men of high places could double in endeavors of ill repute, giving the lie to their supposed patriotism. Examples, however, abound. About the same time, there was General Wilkinson, who worked both for the United States and Spain. Vice-President Aaron Burr came through Louisiana attempting to form a filibuster group and was tried for treason. Barthelemy Lafon had been a successful New Orleans architect, engineer, surveyor, cartographer, and scholar before he lost his wealth and took to pirating, and his venture did take him into the waters just off our coast.

Perhaps obligations to country were not yet engrained in the young republic. In the case of Blanque, such an assumption can be understood in light of his having just come to Louisiana in 1803. In addition, there are indications that he was less committed than many to the causes which he expressed outwardly. One example is in the 1812 proceedings of a committee to form a state constitution and government. Blanque was appointed to this group and voted against the annexation of West Florida; while there were other "nay" votes, his was suspicious if in fact he owned property and pursued an illegal trade there, namely at the Pirate House.

Another incident occurred in September 1814, when he was appointed to a committee of nine formed to cooperate with the military in defending New Orleans against the impending British invasion. Considering that he was one of the legislature's most vocal members, it is curious that he did not sign the findings of the committee.

Later, on December 31, 1814—a mere fortnight before the Battle of New Orleans—Blanque was accused of being part of a plan "among several members of the legislature to surrender the country to the enemy." It was said that their belief was that the British would respect their property. Although the accuser retracted his charge of treason, there remains the question of what was the real character of the man Jean Blanque.

Returning to the legend, the owner of the Pirate House was believed to have organized pirates to defend against the British. Perhaps he did not do the organizing, but was the enabling force.

Although the legend credits the overlord of the pirates with organizing them to help in the defense of New Orleans, the record of events shows that few, if any, citizens or military welcomed them initially. Indeed, Jackson had called them "hellish banditti." Claiborne had put out a reward for Lafitte's capture.

Historical fact in which we can feel secure tells of the brothers Lafitte's turning down and reporting an offer to serve the British and then being determined to help the cause of New Orleans. The determination to join the fight came from the Lafittes, both Jean and Pierre. It was they—incidentally after Blanque had been instrumental in getting Pierre out of prison—who were intent on petitioning Governor Claiborne to allow the

Baratarians to join the fight. But they did not have direct access to Claiborne, and therefore sought an

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Heritage Cookbook

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Katrina Cookbook

By Charlet Russell (\$19.95)

A collection of recipes by Bayou Tours

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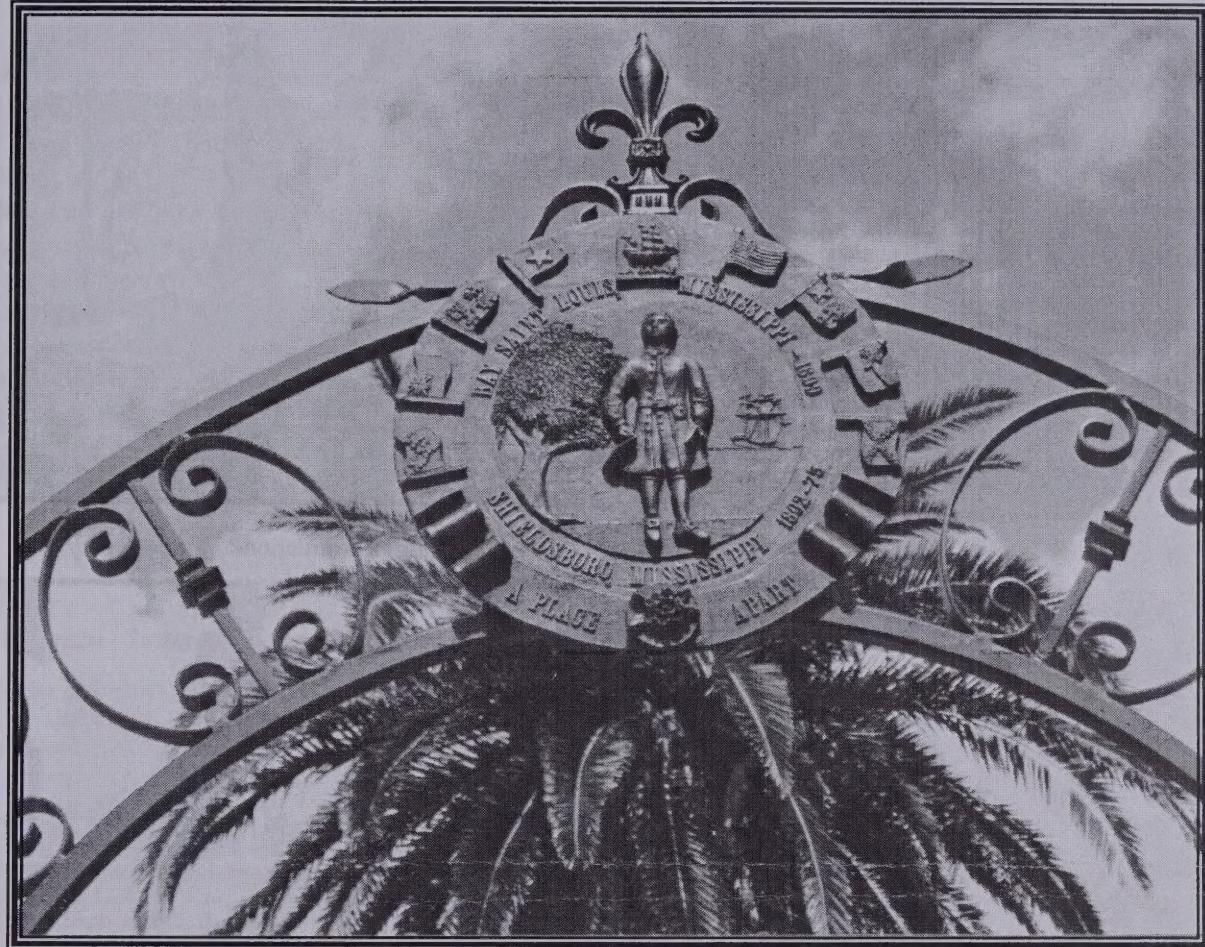
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Tercentenary Park

By
Charles Gray

Tercentenary Park was dedicated on August 25, 1999, to celebrate the 1699 exploration of the Bay of Saint Louis by d'Iberville and Bienville. It was the feast day of Saint Louis, Louis IX, king of France, who had been canonized on that date in 1299.

Hurricane Katrina struck the park with full force on August 29, 2005. The iron fence with its beautiful arched gate was torn from its framework and lay twisted around the base of the Bienville statue. Many pieces of the red granite pedestal were broken and were washed away, but the statue itself remained untouched by the mayhem.

Beach Boulevard was so eroded that access to the park was difficult for weeks, and when we were able to survey the damage, the large bronze city crest and the replicas of the ships, *Le Marin* and *La Badine*, were missing as were many of the engraved bricks from the walkway.

In 2007 a group of students from Delaware Valley College of Pennsylvania came down during their spring vacation to help clear the debris in the park. Planting, trees, flowers, and grass, they also salvaged nearly 260 of the bricks and re-laid them in the walkway. The park and the rebuilt Hancock Bank were the first restorations completed on Beach Boulevard.

The Bucks/Mont restoration group from Pennsylvania, who were incredibly generous with both time and money after the disaster,

promptly offered to donate the funds to restore the front fence and iron-work. The work was contracted to Crescent Iron Works in Picayune and was completed in 2008. Again these wonderful friends came down from Pennsylvania to help us celebrate our recovery and to honor the memory of one of their own, Bill Eastburn. A plaque was engraved and will be placed as the center stone in the Palm Terrace at the park.

The original city crest and ship replicas were sculpted by local artisans Dr. Mary Ott Davidson and her husband, Ken Davidson, but were lost in Katrina. Fortunately the Davidsons had preserved the original molds and were able to reproduce sculptures to replace the originals.

The Hancock County Historical Society is very grateful to the many generous people who have helped in this restoration.



Original dedication, August 25, 1999



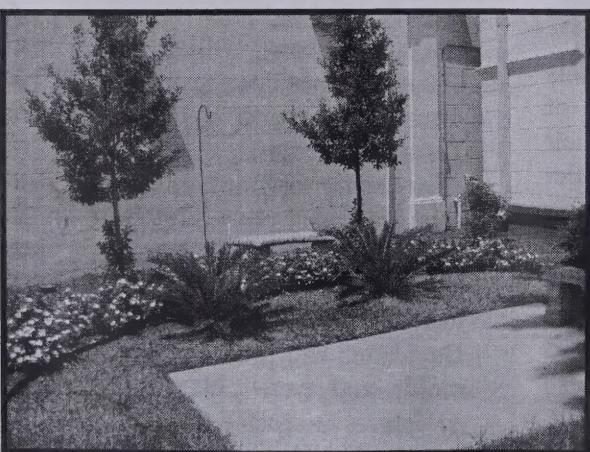
Katrina destruction of Tercentenary Park



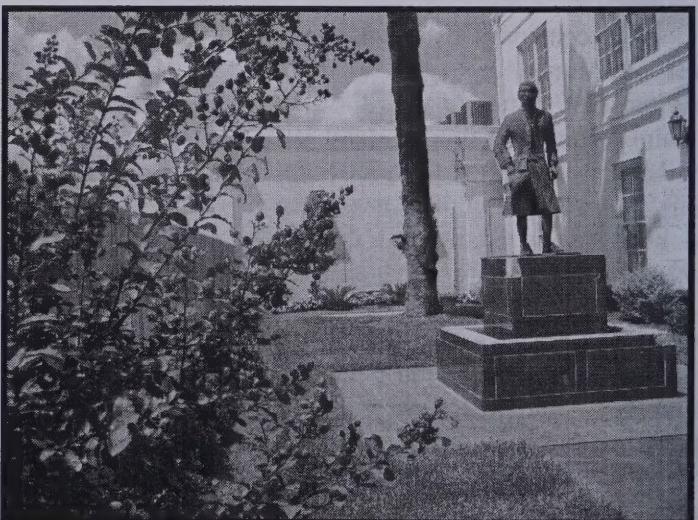
Erik Fleischer, Normandy Gack, and Nancy Bergere of the Bucks/Mont restoration group at the rededication of Tercentenary Park in March 2007



Delaware Valley College student volunteers



The Palm Terrace where the plaque dedicated to the memory of Bill Eastburn will be placed



The restored grounds of Tercentenary Park

intermediary who had the stature to request an audience. To him they delivered letters which he presented and won their case. That man was Jean Blanque.

One can see how the legend may have evolved over the years. It was not exact in historical detail, but the meanings were there, and they point to the personage of Jean Blanque.



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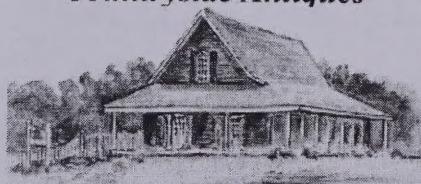
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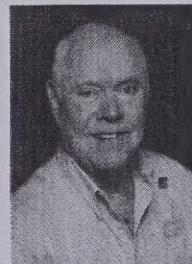
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